

2000 Standardized Testing and Reporting Program

Questions and Answers for Parents

What is the STAR testing program?

One part of the state testing system is the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) program. This program, administered annually, was authorized in 1997 by state law (Senate Bill 376). The purpose of the STAR testing program is to help measure how well students are learning basic academic skills.

Who must take the STAR tests?

All students in grades 2 through 11 must take the designated STAR tests. Students learning English and students in special education programs are included. Only students whose Individual Education Plans (IEP) specifically exempt them from standardized testing and students with written parent requests to exempt them do not take the STAR tests.

What tests will the students take in 2000?

For the third year, public school students will be tested with the Stanford Achievement Test, Ninth Edition, Form T (Stanford 9), published by Harcourt Educational Measurement.

Students in grades 2 through 11 will be tested in reading, writing, and mathematics. Students in grades 2 through 8 also will be tested in spelling; students in grades 9 through 11 also will be tested in history-social science and science.

As part of the STAR program, students are given additional test questions that match state-adopted content standards for reading, writing, and mathematics. The purpose of augmenting the test is to better align the STAR program with state standards.

How do the questions for the STAR augmentation relate to a student's grade level?

In grades 2 through 7 and in grade 11, the questions for the STAR augmentation in reading, writing, and mathematics are tied to what students should know and be able to do at each grade level. In grades 8 through 10, augmented questions for reading and writing are tied to specific grade levels. The augmented questions for mathematics in grades 8 through 10 are not tied to a specific grade level. They are tied to the math course in which a student is enrolled.

What are the math courses for which there is a STAR augmentation?

There are six test options for the augmented math test: algebra I, geometry, algebra II, 1st-year integrated math, 2nd-year integrated math, and 3rd-year integrated math.

What if a student in grade 8, 9, or 10 is not enrolled in one of the specified courses?

A student in grade 8, 9, or 10 who is not enrolled in one of the specified courses does not take the STAR augmentation in mathematics. That student takes the mathematics portion of the Stanford 9, Form T, and will receive results for that part of the STAR test.

If a student in grade 8, 9, or 10 is enrolled in a math class more advanced than his or her grade level, how will the scores for the STAR augmentation be reported?

Students in grade 8, 9, or 10 who take the STAR augmentation above or below the designated grade-level test will receive individual scores. Their scores will not be included in the school scores for their grade level.

School, district, county, and state results on the math augmentation will report eighth graders completing the algebra I or 1st-year integrated math tests, ninth graders completing the geometry or 2nd-year integrated math tests, and tenth graders completing the algebra II or 3rd-year integrated math tests.

What about limited English-proficient students?

In addition to taking the designated STAR tests in English, limited English-proficient Spanish-speaking students who first enrolled in California public schools fewer than 12 months prior to testing must take a primary language test in Spanish. Primary language testing is optional if the students first enrolled more than 12 months prior to testing. The designated test in Spanish for spring 2000 is the Spanish Assessment of Basic Education, Second Edition (SABE/2). This test is published by CTB/McGraw-Hill.

What does the SABE/2 test cover?

The SABE/2 covers reading, language, mathematics, spelling at grades 2 through 11; word analysis at grades 2 and 3; and study skills at grades 4 through 11.

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Who gives the STAR tests, and how long do they take?

Teachers who receive special training give the STAR tests at the local school. It takes about 7 hours for the Stanford 9 and STAR augmentation. The primary language test in Spanish adds about 4 hours for limited English-proficient students taking the SABE/2. In most schools STAR testing is spread over several days.

How are the questions on the tests asked?

All of the test questions are in a multiple-choice format. These questions require students to select the correct answer from four possible answers. Questions on the Stanford 9 and SABE/2 tests have been tried out with thousands of students throughout the United States to see if they are appropriate for the grade level and content being tested. Questions for the STAR augmentation have been tried out on students throughout California.

Can parents see the STAR tests?

No. The test questions can be seen only by students when they take the tests. This security measure ensures that the tests are fair for all students and that test questions can be used for more than one year. The law requiring STAR testing does allow local school boards to see the tests under secure conditions.

What if parents do not want their student tested?

According to Education Code section 60615, parents or guardians can submit a written request to the principal of their student's school if they do not wish to have their student take any or all parts of the tests. Written requests from parents or guardians are honored.

What is done to help students with special needs?

Most students with special needs take the test with all other students under standard conditions. Certain accommodations and adaptations such as additional time, Braille, or large-print tests are provided for those special education students who need assistance. Accommodations also include revised test directions or format or the use of aides and/or aids to provide additional help. Testing accommodations for students in special education will vary depending on the content of the specific test. The accommodations must be based on explicit statements in each student's IEP.

What if a student is absent on testing days or misses one part of the required tests?

Schools will provide at least two test makeup dates. Parents should contact the school about test makeup procedures.

Who will see the test results for individual students?

Each student's teacher and parents or guardians will see the individual student results. Individual student results are confidential. Copies will be kept in the student's cumulative file with other confidential data.

How and when will parents get their student's test results?

Each student's test results must be reported to parents within 20 working days after the school district receives them. In most cases these reports will be mailed. Group results by grade level for each school, district, county, and the state will be posted on the Internet no later than July 15, 2000. Results for the Stanford 9 and the augmentation and results for the SABE/2 will be on separate reports.

How will individual test results be reported for students?

The Stanford 9 and SABE/2 results will be reported as national percentiles. A national percentile compares the student's results with scores of students at the same grade who were and tested at the same time of the school year in a national sample.

The scores for the STAR augmentation will be reported as the number of questions the student answered correctly. There will be no comparison to other students. In future years, these scores will indicate levels of student performance such as advanced, proficient, basic, and below basic. These levels of performance will relate to how well students are meeting state standards for each subject area tested.

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What about STAR reports for students with special needs?

Reports for students with special needs will include only the number of questions answered correctly if:

- students take the test in Braille, or
- students take a test that is for students more than one grade level below the grade they would be assigned to in a regular program.

Reports for students with special needs include all test scores but are designated “non-standard test administration” if:

- students are given extra time to take the test,
- students are given special assistance, or
- students used a revised test form.

How are the STAR test results used?

Teachers, parents, and students use individual STAR results to help monitor each student’s academic progress. Individual student results are merged to prepare grade-level reports by subject area for each school, district, county, and the state. The results are used with other information about student achievement to help make decisions about ways to improve student learning and school programs.

Stanford 9 test results for the 1999 administration were used to calculate the 1999 Academic Performance Index (API) for schools throughout California. The API, a major component of the state’s new accountability program, is to be used to rank the academic performance of schools, set targets for growth, and monitor progress over time. The Stanford 9 results for 2000 will be used to see how well schools meet their 1999–2000 targets.

How can parents help their students do better on STAR?

Prior to testing each year, parents need to talk to their students about the STAR test(s) and encourage them to do their best. Parents or guardians should:

- make sure class assignments and homework are completed throughout the year.
- listen to students read every day—review what they are doing in school.
- ensure that students are in school every day unless they are ill.

Parents can help prepare students for testing day by making sure they have plenty of rest and a good breakfast. Schools have information about ways families can help their students improve in specific academic areas.

How can parents help the school improve student achievement?

Schools invite parents, guardians, and other community members to become actively involved in improving student learning. Every school has various committees of parents who assist in school decision making, including the Parent Teacher Association and school site councils. In addition, individual teachers are frequently in search of volunteers to help with classroom instruction. Research studies show that parent and community involvement in the school can improve academic achievement.

How can parents get their questions about STAR and their student’s results and the API answered?

Parents or guardians should begin with their students’ teachers. Additional information may be available through the school principal or counselor. Questions about the STAR program also can be directed to the STAR test coordinator at the school district office.